



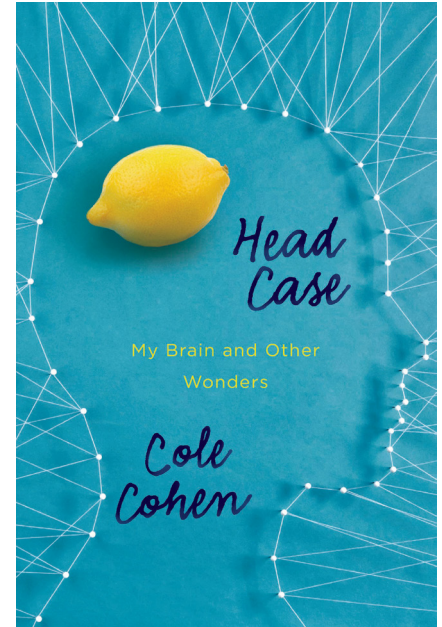
Reading Group Gold

Head Case

By Cole Cohen

About this Book

The summer before she was set to head out-of-state to pursue her MFA, twenty-six-year-old Cole Cohen submitted herself to a battery of tests. For as long as she could remember, she'd struggled with a series of learning disabilities that made it nearly impossible to judge time and space—standing at a cross walk, she couldn't tell you if an oncoming car would arrive in ten seconds or thirty; if you asked her to let you know when ten minutes had passed, she might notify you in a minute or an hour. These symptoms had always kept her from getting a driver's license, which she wanted to have for grad school. Instead of leaving the doctor's office with permission to drive, she left with a shocking diagnosis—doctors had found a large hole in her brain responsible for her life-long struggles. Because there weren't established tools to rely on in the wake of this unprecedented and mysterious diagnosis, Cole and her doctors and family create them, and discover firsthand how best to navigate the unique world that Cole lives in. Told without an ounce of self-pity and plenty of charm and wit, *Head Case* is ultimately a story of triumph, as we watch this passionate, loveable, and unsinkable young woman chart a path for herself.



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Discussion Questions

1. How did the tone Cole uses to tell her story affect your reading experience? What did her humor and self-deprecation add?
2. Did Cole's story open your eyes in new ways to the realities of people living under unusual physical circumstances? How so? Was there anything in particular that surprised you?
3. What was your favorite scene in the book? Why did it stick out to you?
4. While Cole's specific circumstance is unique, did you find her thought processes or emotional journey similar to yours? In what ways?
5. In many ways, Cole lives outside the confines of time pressures. While this makes life hard for her on many levels, did her descriptions about time and the way we structure our lives cause you to consider daily life in a different way? Did you see the "mundane" in a new light? If so, how? Do you think we, as a society, place too much emphasis on time/efficiency? Why or why not?
6. Discuss this quote: "Everyone has a labyrinthine brain with a Minotaur at the center: a memory, an illness, a heartache, a deep frustration. Shake hooves with your Minotaur; invite your Minotaur to coffee" (220). What is your Minotaur? How can you coexist with it?



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7. At one point Cole says, “What we want, and what we are horrified by are the same thing.” Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
8. What differences did you notice between Cole’s relationship with her father and her relationship with her mother? How did these differences affect her journey into adulthood?
9. If you could ask Cole one question what would it be? Why?
10. Over and over again Cole expresses a struggle with vulnerability: with Charlie, with strangers, even sometimes with her parents. Do you think this is unique to someone with a hole in their brain or is it a common human struggle? Do you face a similar struggle?
11. Cole moves around quite a bit in the book. Did you notice any significance tied to different physical locations? How do these different places inform her life as a whole?
12. How is Cole a different person at the end of the book than the Cole you met at the beginning of the book?

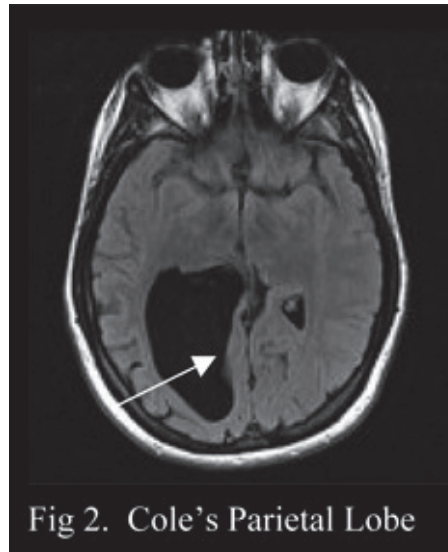


Fig 2. Cole’s Parietal Lobe

Cohen’s MRI Scan



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About this Author

Cole Cohen graduated from the California Institute of the Arts MFA program in Writing and Critical Studies in 2009. She was a finalist for the Bakeless Prize and the Association of Writers & Writing Programs prize in Nonfiction and she has been a Yaddo Fellow. She currently lives in Santa Barbara, California where she works as the Events and Program Coordinator for UC Santa Barbara's Interdisciplinary Humanities Center.



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